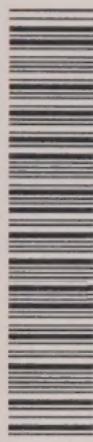


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A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CAREER PLANNING FOR CHILDREN



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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Ministry
of
Education

Hon. Bette Stephenson, M.D., Minister
Harry K. Fisher, Deputy Minister

“What should I become?”

Every child asks this question and every parent looks for answers. It is a question that is becoming increasingly complex in the face of technological advances and rapid changes in the world of work. This pamphlet presents points to consider as well as practical suggestions that should help parents deal with the career-related questions of their children. It is also intended to help parents prepare for talks with their children's guidance counsellors and teachers. The last section of the pamphlet lists sources of information on career planning.

Parents play a major – indeed, a unique – role in their children's career planning: they encourage and guide the earliest career dreams; they provide a home environment that inspires trust and invites discussion of hopes and aspirations, as well as the realities that must temper them; most important, as the most trusted and esteemed adults in the child's life, parents exert tremendous influence and are therefore in the best position to give advice and guide decisions.

At the same time, parents should realize that the task of career planning can be a shared responsibility. They should establish contact with teachers, counsellors, and other adults at the school who are involved in helping their children with their career choices. Nor is the school the only source of assistance; many professionals and organizations in the community will gladly help with advice and information. Materials related to counselling can be obtained by writing to the addresses listed in this pamphlet.

Many parents wonder whether it is wise to begin discussing careers while children are still in the early grades of school. Research studies have established that children form very definite attitudes towards careers and their own aspirations before the end of elementary school. Therefore, counselling experts advise that career discussions should begin as early as possible. Care must be taken, however, to explore a wide range of options and to approach them positively so that no limitations or prejudices are created in the child's mind.

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"Should I be what you want me to be?"

As every parent knows, it is natural to harbour the hope that one's child will become what one once dreamt of becoming. Parents and other adults in a position of influence must be careful not to burden children with their unfulfilled career ambitions. When a child asks *What should I become?* the answer should make the point that it is more important to be happy with one's own choices than to choose what someone else would like one to choose. Guidance counsellors recommend that parents keep an open mind about their children's choices, whether or not these correspond to parental hopes and expectations.

"The only certainty in our children's lives is uncertainty," says one authority on counselling. "If we can escape the clutches of economic necessity, we should teach our children to value and believe in themselves as people, regardless of their role in the labour force of the future." A parent's greatest contribution may be to instil the confidence that will allow the child to grow and adapt. The ability to cope with change is a necessary tool. "Psychosclerosis" – hardening of the attitudes – is to be avoided.

Recent statistical projections indicate that one out of every three jobs that will exist ten years from now is unknown today. A child's future may lie in a field not yet imagined. With that prospect, the qualities that can best serve young people are self-assurance, flexibility, an urge for continuous learning, and a broad skill-and-knowledge base.

Parents must never lose sight of the fact that they are their children's role models. Very early in life children absorb attitudes towards work. The goals that lie behind their parents' career decisions and the rewards that they most value – money, status, power, personal satisfaction – will quickly be recognized and will become the children's basis for decisions relating to career planning. The fulfilment or boredom that parents experience in their jobs will shape their children's attitudes towards work and will determine whether they come to see work as something to be enjoyed or endured.

“Can I become a skydiver?”

What should parents say if a child wants to be an astronaut, a ballerina, a professional athlete, or a symphony conductor – or dreams of other one-in-a-million careers? The consensus is that parents should share the dream, explore it, refine it, read about the child’s heroes, meet professionals in the field – and watch the dream evolve or change direction as part of the natural process of maturing.

Parents will discover that virtually every professional superstar has had alternative career plans. Children should be reminded of the symphony conductor who became a music teacher, the professional football player who became a coach, the ballerina who became a choreographer.

By exploring many alternatives and adopting a relaxed attitude, parents can reduce some of the anxiety that often surrounds a child’s career planning. Curiosity, patience, and a sense of humour are more helpful than the tense seriousness with which many adults approach career-related decisions. Objectivity is also an advantage. Expectations that spring more from the parents’ achievements than from the child’s own aptitudes should not form part of career planning: the child of a librarian should not automatically be expected to have a keen interest in books and scholarly pursuits; the child of a farmer should not be expected to want to take up farming. The child’s own gifts and tastes may indicate paths other than the expected ones, and alert and sensitive parents will detect and encourage these aptitudes. Above all, adults who help children with their career planning must always strive to make decisions *with* rather than *for* the children.

“Why do I have to take ... English? ... math?”

Choosing subjects in high school is a critical component of career planning, and one that should concern parents. Wise choices can best be achieved in consultation with guidance counsellors who are equipped with up-to-date information on careers, educational requirements, and job trends.

Ideally, a student's subject choices should provide a flexible basis that allows for alternatives in career and life planning. On the one hand, a broad educational background will provide access to a wide range of opportunities; on the other, the lack of the right high school subjects could block career paths in later life. The lifelong consequences of dropping subjects such as science and mathematics should be made clear. Students should be warned against making important subject choices on the basis of emotional reasons such as personal dislike of a certain subject teacher or peer pressure – the desire to stay in the same classes as one's friends.

It is essential for parents and child to meet the teacher or counsellor with whom the child has been discussing career plans. By helping children weigh the consequences of subject choices, parents can reinforce the school's constant emphasis on basics such as English, mathematics, and science.

“Should I go to college ... university ... or enter a trade?”

The question children should be asking is not *Where should I go to continue my education?* but, rather, *What would I like to do?* For instance, a child may like to experiment with electricity and electronics. He or she could become an *electrician* – whose job is to install and maintain electrical equipment in homes and factories; or an *electronics technologist* – whose job is to design new equipment; or a *research engineer* – whose job is to explore new uses for electricity.

Once the child has decided on a career, then he or she can decide on a training program: an apprenticeship to become a journeyman; a college of applied arts and technology program to become a technologist; or a university program to become an engineer.

Each course has its advantages and disadvantages. One cannot really say that university is “better” than apprenticeship or that college is “better” than university; it all depends on what the child wants to do. And if the child is thinking about money, it should be remembered that many skilled workers now earn as much as professionals. Moreover, parents may wish to point out that, although money is important, a satisfying career is much more important. The prime consideration should be: Does the particular training program and the career being considered give the child the chance to use his or her skills and knowledge to the fullest?

Choosing a career today is an extremely difficult task; for one thing, it is hard to foresee which occupations will be in demand when the children who are making career decisions today are ready to enter the work force. Some occupations that will be in demand *then* probably do not even exist today; on the other hand, some of the occupations that exist today will probably have vanished by the time we reach 1990. That is how fast the labour force is changing.

Employees in the twenty-first century will probably have two or three or four careers. They will probably have to be retrained time and time again. The training program they enter after secondary school will be the beginning, not the end of their training.

However uncertain the future, one thing we do know: skills in mathematics, English, and science will be in demand. It is therefore important that every child do as well as he or she can in these three subjects.

“Does gender matter?”

In view of the rapid changes taking place both on the social and labour fronts, parents today have a special responsibility to ensure that their children's potential is not being limited by outdated perceptions of the roles of men and women in society.

Employment surveys and forecasts indicate that the majority of women will spend at least twenty-five years in the labour force. Early career counselling that leads to well-considered choices can contribute significantly to the level of satisfaction and remuneration that girls will achieve in their working lives.

Sex stereotypes are deeply ingrained and hence difficult to alter, in spite of good intentions. Female children may unwittingly be steered into occupations such as nurse, teacher, social worker, secretary – occupations that have traditionally been considered particularly suitable for women. Male children may be unduly pressured into choosing a career solely for its financial rewards in the expectation that they will be the only breadwinners in their future families – an expectation invalidated both by statistics and social trends.

Current employment forecasts indicate that many office jobs traditionally held by women may be drastically altered or eliminated in the near future because of the microelectronic revolution. However, in professions and trades in which women have been under-represented, new awareness of female potential is creating job openings.

Parents can do a great deal towards ensuring that their children's thinking is free of limiting stereotypes and that they make their choices without being hampered by considerations that have little validity today and will have even less in the future. Nothing in this message, or any other pamphlet, can eradicate attitudes built on centuries of tradition. Nevertheless, the current direction of social change appears irreversible. Parents cannot afford to ignore it in guiding the career plans of their children.

“Can you find out for me?”

The first place parents should look for assistance in counsellng their children is in the school. Most elementary and secondary schools have a wide range of career-counselling materials. They also have access to the Student Guidance Information System (SGIS), a large computerized data bank on occupations, maintained and updated by the Ministry of Education.

Parents are welcome in school guidance offices and are entitled to the services provided there. Parents may be interested in obtaining, on behalf of their children, computer printouts of information stored in the SGIS data bank. The service provides outlines of about 1000 occupations and gives practical details on training and educational requirements. Materials are also available from counselling offices in colleges and universities, public libraries, and government and private agencies (see the list at the end of this pamphlet).

Parents should also be aware that their children have opportunities to take courses in career development and life planning, both in elementary and secondary schools. Starting in September 1984, all pupils in Grades 7 and 8 will be required to take twenty hours of guidance instruction. At the secondary school level, optional courses in career development and life planning are available at some high schools in Ontario.

Practical Tips for Parents*

- Your own career success will influence your ability to support your child's career planning.
- Indifference to your child's planning is as dangerous as pushing too hard.
- Encourage your child to ask and think about questions like "What kind of person am I and what will I be?"
- Try to help your child understand that not everyone can be completely competent in all things – doing one's best is being successful.
- Make a special effort to help your child become aware of the world of work by sharing your work with them.
- Reinforce the importance and practice of work-related attitudes such as promptness and dependability.
- Encourage your child to seek summer or part-time employment, as well as volunteer-work experiences.
- Help your child understand how important school work will be in later job decisions and how it relates to the larger world of work.
- Encourage your child to talk with teachers and counsellors about career plans and hopes. After such discussions, talk with your child.
- Supply your child with occupationally-oriented books, magazines, and games that will widen his/her interests and create awareness of the abilities, job skills, and values involved in various occupations.
- Television programs supply both excellent and poor models of occupations. Try to watch and then discuss these programs with your child.

*The tips listed have been adapted from *Career Planning: How Parents Can Help*, a booklet produced by the Ontario School Counsellors' Association.

Sources of Free Counselling Materials

Ministry of Education/
Ministry of Colleges and
Universities
Queen's Park
Mowat Block, 14th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

After 8?, a booklet for the
parents of students enter-
ing high school; *Horizons*,
the post-secondary educa-
tion directory; fact sheets
on many topics, other
relevant publications

Employment and
Immigration Canada
Inquiries and Distribution
Public Affairs Division
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0J2

Creating a Career;
Creative Job Search;
Employment Counselling
Materials; Guide for Job
Hunters; other related
items

Ministry of Labour, Ontario
Publications Centre
400 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1T7

Employment Facts for
Ontario Students; Job
Hunting Hints for the
Handicapped; other
related items (order form
available)

Ontario Youth Secretariat
P.O. Box 500
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Z1

The Edge on Finding a
Job; other items

Canadian Federation of
Independent Business
15 Coldwater Road
Don Mills, Ontario
M3B 3J1

Project Self-Reliance:
Small Business Is Good
Business; other materials

Royal Bank of Canada
Public Relations
Royal Bank Plaza
200 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5J 2J5

The Work Ethic Is Not
Dead; other career
development pamphlets
in the Royal Bank Letter
Series

Sources of Inexpensive Counselling Materials

Guidance Centre
Faculty of Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2Y3

Ontario School
Counsellors' Association
3545 Twinmaple Drive
Mississauga, Ontario
L4Y 3P9

Bridging the Gap
155 College Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1P6

Ministry of Government
Services
Publications Services
Centre
880 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6

Canadian Government
Publishing Centre
Supply and Services
Canada
Hull, Quebec
K1A 1N8

*The School Guidance
Worker* magazine; many
other items

*Career Planning: How
Parents Can Help*

Jobs for Your Future, a
career opportunity and
training directory

Mail order sales of
Ontario government
publications

Mail order sales of federal
government publications

Suggested Reading for Parents

The books listed are available from most public libraries.

Bolles, Richard N. *What Color Is Your Parachute?: A Practical Manual for Job Hunters and Career Changers*. Berkeley, Cal.: Ten Speed Press, 1982.

_____. *The Three Boxes of Life*. Berkeley, Cal.: Ten Speed Press, 1978.

Campbell, David. *If You Don't Know Where You're Going, You'll Probably End Up Somewhere Else*. Illinois: Argus Communications, 1974.

Cosgrave, Gerald. *Choices for Tomorrow: Career Planning*. Toronto: Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, 1978.

Holland, John L. *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Careers*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Hummell, Deal L., and McDaniels, Carl. *How to Help Your Child Plan a Career*. Washington: Acropolis Books, 1979.

Irish, Richard K. *Go Hire Yourself an Employer*. Rev. ed. New York: Doubleday, 1978.

Kirn, Arthur G., and O'Donahue Kirn, Marie. *Life Work Planning*. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.

Super, Donald E. *The Psychology of Careers: An Introduction to Vocational Development*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

ISBN 0-7743-8208-2